

ENVIRONMENT AND ECONOMY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2014 AT 10.00 AM

PRESENT: Councillor Nedved (Chairman), Mrs Bowman, Caig, Mrs Vasey (as substitute for Councillor Mitchelson), Watson and Wilson

ALSO

PRESENT: Councillor Glover – Leader (until 11.55)
Councillor Mrs Martlew – Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder
Ms S Caldwell – Chamber of Commerce – Growth Hub
Ms M Lawty-Jones – University of Cumbria
Mr P Foster – Federation of Small Businesses

OFFICERS: Deputy Chief Executive
Director of Economic Development
Director of Local Environment
Economic Development Officer
Green Spaces and Bereavement Services Manager
Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Strategic Property Manager

EEOSP.65/14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Dodd, Graham and Mitchelson.

An apology for absence was also submitted on behalf of Councillor Mrs Bradley – Economy, Enterprise and Housing Portfolio Holder

EEOSP.66/14 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Watson declared an interest in accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct in respect of Item A.2 – Business Support. The interest related to the fact that he is a member of Cumbria County Council.

EEOSP.67/14 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETINGS

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder advised that in respect of the Minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2014 the memorandum of claimed rights had still not been signed and that the next meeting of the Highways and Transport Working Group had been cancelled.

RESOLVED – 1. That the minutes of the meetings held on 25 September 2014 be noted.

EEOSP.68/14 CALL IN OF DECISIONS

There were no matters which had been the subject of call in.

EEOSP.69/14 BUSINESS SUPPORT

The Chairman welcomed the representatives from the Chamber of Commerce, Federation of Small Businesses and University of Cumbria to the meeting and explained that the session would provide an overview of business support in the district. Following the meeting a Task Group of Councillors would be appointed to undertake a longer review of business support. The session provided Members with information to aid the Task Group to determine the areas on which they wished to focus.

The Director of Economic Development submitted report ED.43/14 that briefed Members of the Panel on business support, how it was delivered in the past and the changes introduced by the Government following the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies with a specific focus on Carlisle.

The Director of Economic Development explained the types of support which had been offered in the past and accessed through Business Link North West which was run by the North West Development Agency (NWDA).

Following the change in Government in 2010 and the abolition of the Regional Development Agencies the Government reviewed how business support was delivered and the Director of Economic Development outlined the key principles. In addition the organisations and agencies delivering business support changed. The Regional Development Agency and Business Link were abolished and business support was led at a strategic level through the Department of Business Innovation and Skills and the Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs).

In Carlisle business support was delivered by the Cumbria Business Growth Hub which was run by the Chamber of Commerce. The Growth Hub encompassed a range of private and public sector partners and a range of activities supporting small and medium enterprises through a range of co-ordinated activity. The Growth Hub included a range of local, regional and national partners including the University of Cumbria. In September 2012 the University of Cumbria's Business School was opened at the Business Interaction Centre (BIC) in Carlisle. The Director of Economic Development outlined the range of activities and support available.

The Director of Economic Development explained that the City Council continued to support businesses with a series of focussed and individual business support. In particular, as part of the 'business account' management function the City council provided a link between businesses and the LEP and supporting any bids for funding. The Director of Economic Development outlined some of the local initiatives and support.

The Chairman invited Ms Lawty-Jones from the University of Cumbria to give a presentation on the first year of the Centre and what provision of support was provided to local businesses.

Ms Lawty-Jones explained gave a presentation that included the background to the University, the location and type of faculties available. Ms Lawty-Jones advised that the University had 12,000 students and 1,200 staff. She worked closely with the Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Economic Development. A lot of work had also been done with Professor Frank Peck and his team.

Ms Lawty-Jones outlined the background to the BIC and its aims and current situation. Current footfall was approximately 1,000 people per month. The BIC was a home for the Business School in Carlisle to grown part-time and distance learning provision, CPD and short courses and engagement with businesses. It provided hot desking and managed space for entrepreneurs and micro businesses.

In future the aim was to increase collaborative research and knowledge exchange work and consultancy, developing and delivering short courses for the business community and gain the Small Business Charter through the Association of Business Schools.

Ms Lawty-Jones outlined the current and future activity of the Centre for Regional Economic Development (CRED) and the business development including providing placements to small and medium businesses and providing skills master classes. The BIC also provided one to one support to students, seminars and workshops in partnership with the Chamber of Commerce, local businesses and national organisations. In future it was hoped to hold law clinics with a local law firm, to hold a mini trade fair with local businesses and workshops during Global Entrepreneurship Week.

In considering the presentation the following comments and questions were raised:

- *With regard to retail the representatives from the twelve retail companies had hoped that things would move more quickly than they have.*

Ms Lawty-Jones explained that the work with retailers was important and that the project would grow and develop.

- *Members sought assurance that the main focus for students would be in Carlisle.*

Ms Lawty-Jones explained that the University looked at the demand for available courses. She added that there were no plans with withdraw the course from Lancaster as the business faculty was well established in Lancaster and that if it moved to Carlisle it could dilute the number of students and therefore affect the viability of the course.

Ms Lawty-Jones believed that the Carlisle campus was critical to the regional economy and there were plans for a bio-chemical facility and an increase in the number of creativity and digital courses as well as project management and the built environment. There will also be courses on health technology with regard to supported living that would be developed in Carlisle.

- *The University needs to look at the strengths and develop the University in Cumbria.*

The Director of Economic Development stated that Carlisle was a University City and the BIC was a good example of how the University was becoming established in Carlisle. She had had discussions with Ms Lawty-Jones on how the University could grow but these were challenging times. There was a business growth plan that focussed on Carlisle.

Ms Lawty-Jones added that the University HQ was based in Carlisle and was a deliberate move as the University was developing.

- *The direction of travel was encouraging. He had held discussions with Peter Strike with regard to manufacturing which was the key to attracting students to the City. The*

focus now was to collect data from students who come to Carlisle and those who considered Carlisle but then chose to study elsewhere.

Ms Lawty-Jones advised that the University were considering a broader student experience and were looking at retail, entertainment, accommodation and how welcoming residents in Carlisle were to students, particularly those from overseas. There was a lot of partnership work to be done to promote Carlisle and the Sense of Place had been a useful tool.

- *Had there been any feedback on how business were using the BIC and how supportive the BIC had been?*

That feedback had been through conversations only at this stage and Ms Lawty-Jones explained that the University were planning to undertake a survey in the New Year.

The Director of Economic Development believed the information from that survey could be useful to the forthcoming Task and Finish Group.

- *It is important to keep the skills in the City and the County. What was the success rate of placements?*

Ms Lawty-Jones advised that there had been challenges with encouraging small businesses to take on placements and there was still a lot of work to do. Ms Lawty-Jones informed Members that she did not have to hand the numbers of graduates who stayed in Carlisle on completion of their course but would pass that information on.

- *It is important that Carlisle starts to think like a University City. There is now wi-fi in the City Centre which is something that students now expect. Graduation ceremonies are special and the City has to make a big thing of them to change people's attitudes.*

The Chairman thanked Ms Lawty-Jones for her input and invited Ms Caldwell from the Chamber of Commerce to give a presentation on the Growth Hub and the provision of support provided.

Ms Caldwell advised that the Chamber was one of the top chambers nationally and had reached the last three in the bidding for the Small Business Support project. The Chamber had re-won the contract to help young people into business.

The Chamber had its headquarters in Carlisle and provided a one stop shop giving advice on funding. The Chamber worked in partnership with the University of Cumbria, Lancaster Management School and UCLAN as well as wider partners including the Growth Accelerator Programme. The Chamber had its own branding. The Chamber was currently developing a family business network.

Ms Caldwell outlined the services offered by the Growth hub including an action plan implementation subsidy, a digital portal and a directory of suppliers and potential customers. The Growth Hub had a nationally recognised funding search tool as well as a video and messaging chat facility.

Ms Caldwell reminded Members that the back office infrastructure was also important and the Hub included a client management system which held all information about a client to

avoid duplication of data and easier access. There was also information on how the Growth Hub worked with the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).

Moving forward Ms Caldwell advised that a co-ordination group was being set up to increase the co-ordination of data and reduce duplication.

The Growth Hub currently had 230 businesses providing support or assistance and 491 new jobs had been created a quarter of which were in the County. The start up facility had been partly funded by the City Council and 250 new businesses had been started with approximately 150 about to start.

The Growth Hub arranged events including meeting experts and a three day business course. Future courses included social media, and enterprise day and small business Saturday.

The Chairman thanked Ms Caldwell for her input and invited questions and comments.

In considering the presentation the following comments and questions were raised:

Mr Foster from the Federation of Small Businesses believed that the branding and website were both good and that the website was easy to navigate. Mr Foster requested more information about the Small Business Support Service.

Ms Caldwell explained that the service provided a phone-in advice facility, web chat and social media to provide support. The current system was not operating well and the Chamber of Commerce had put in a bid to run the system.

- *How much of the LEP money was made available in Carlisle? It was perceived that the LEP was a planning group and not an implementation group.*

Ms Caldwell advised that in the past the LEP did not have funds but there were now funds available and more was anticipated in the future to be used for infrastructure projects and a small business development fund. The LEP had been slow to get that information out as there had been some problems but was now operation better. Organisations such as the Growth Hub and the University were getting their own funding.

- *Councillor Glover provided the background to the LEP and advised that in the last round of bids Carlisle had received two grants in respect of Durranhill and Longtown.*
- *Was there any data available on the types of businesses being set up? Were people using redundancy money? Were there any key blockages that had prevented businesses from being set up?*

Ms Caldwell advised that there was a mix of people starting up in business. The new Enterprise Allowance Scheme had been successful. Some people had been unemployed for a long period while others were out of work and wished to undertake consultancy work. An increasing number of young people were starting up businesses. The Skills Commission had done research on this and were impressed at the number of young people, particularly young women, becoming entrepreneurs and starting up in business. It would take a number of years before the full information on the success was available. There was a lot of partnership working in Carlisle but more support was needed around what partners were doing.

Ms Caldwell explained that money did not appear to be a blockage to starting a business in Carlisle. The new Enterprise Allowance Scheme gave easy access to loans but the take up had been low nationally. A lot of people extend a hobby and buy equipment through cash flow or from redundancy monies.

- *How was the Growth Hub interacting with people who did not have academic skills and were starting up small niche businesses?*

Ms Caldwell advised that information about the Growth Hub was available in newspapers and on-line, through PR and sponsorship events and banks and accountants. More could be done through social media and that was currently being researched.

- *Were there any figures available on the performance of the Growth Hub?*

Ms Caldwell explained that figures on start up were reported to the Council and advised that there had been in the region of 250 businesses set up over the last two years with approximately 150 businesses about to start.

- *How long does it take for someone wishing to start up in business to get through the system?*

Ms Caldwell advised that it varied; some passed through the system quickly while others took several months.

- *Can you explain about Business Angels?*

Ms Caldwell explained that Business Angels was something that the Growth Hub were considering. It involved people who wished to invest money and expertise to people starting up in business. Currently information was provided by the Growth Hub via a number of events and online. The Enterprise Allowance Scheme allowed people access to a mentor who could provide genuine experience.

The Director of Economic Development queried whether it would be possible for the Task and Finish Group to follow a small business through the process. Ms Caldwell agreed that it could be useful and would discuss the matter further with the Director of Economic Development.

- *The success rates and collaboration work is encouraging. Can that success be enhanced?*

Ms Caldwell advised that the Chamber of Commerce had been providing support for a number of years. In recent times people who had started up a small business were very committed and the conversion rate of people wanting to set up going on to setting up in business had increased.

The Chairman thanked Ms Caldwell for her input and invited Mr Foster to update the Panel about the Federation of Small Businesses.

Mr Foster explained that the Federation was currently in its 40th year and was set up by small businesses in Lancashire who wanted something similar to the CBI. There were currently 200,000 members across the UK. The Federation was funded through

membership subscriptions and provided a number of services including access to legal advice and documents, tax advice, free business banking and preferential rates on business insurance.

Locally the Federation had 350 members from business with between one and ten employees. The organisation was member led and a number of events were organised by the Carlisle and Penrith branch. Membership provided protection and commercial advantages and looked at bringing members together to help each other.

Mr Foster further explained that the Co-operative Bank provided genuinely free business banking which was suitable for small businesses and there was no time limit.

- *How does the Federation attract membership?*

Mr Foster advised that membership was mainly by word of mouth. The head office was based in Blackpool and there was an office in London that dealt with Government issues. Mr Foster and one colleague worked on recruitment. Membership currently had an 85% retention rate.

In response to a query Mr Foster advised that subscriptions were based on the number of employees in the business. The fees for a sole trader were £120 per annum rising to £1,000 for a business with 250 employees.

- *What were the profiles of businesses subscribing to the Federation?*

Mr Foster explained that the business ranged from construction to the service sector, including some social enterprise organisations. The Federation were currently pushing pension provision.

The Chairman thanked Mr Foster for his input and opened the meeting up to further discussion.

A round table discussion session followed where the following comments and questions were raised:

- *How does the collaboration between organisations operate?*

Ms Caldwell advised that the Growth Hub worked with the Federation of Small Businesses to promote the services offered by the Federation and promote events. The Growth Hub also worked with the University working on funding and the delivery of a particular set of services. The Hub works with businesses but if the business is better served by working with a different partner eg a placement, the business is referred on and assistance is shared.

There is a lot of collaboration work in setting up a small business. The City Council, Growth Hub and the University work on joint events by for example providing premises.

Ms Lawty-Jones explained that the University was in contact on a day to day basis with the Hub and the City Council, including the Economic Development Officer.

- *What is the relationship with the City Business Group?*

Mr Dodd explained that the relationship had improved greatly but that they were a different type of organisation. Provided the business is within the City Centre they can join the group. There were currently 300 businesses on the mailing list and businesses were encouraged to share issues.

Mr Dodd believed that Carlisle College and the County Council should have been invited to the meeting as he was concerned about the relationship between the City and County Councils particularly over car parking.

Mr Foster believed that the joint CRM system would be important to allow work to be undertaken in a co-ordinated manner. The Federation worked with a small number of businesses in Carlisle so a lot of businesses were not receiving support from the Federation. Mr Foster advised that it was important to work out how the Federation could get more involved and the shared approach was a start.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the Task and Finish Group would benefit from some baseline data. The available data from 2008 to 2012 indicated that the number of business births and deaths had evened out so there was zero growth. However since then figures indicated that there had been some growth and people were engaging with the Growth Hub and the University and other partners. The Group could look at the reasons why some businesses suffer and fail to continue. It would then be useful to pass the report from the Task and Finish Group to the Executive and Council as well as the County Council. A review of small businesses was undertaken two years ago and Professor Peck was currently updating that information.

Ms Caldwell added that the information from the Business Access survey would also be available and would indicate the barriers to the success of some businesses.

- *Was Carlisle below the national average for business start ups?*

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that Carlisle was below the Cumbrian average and that Cumbria was below the national average. The new businesses were most likely to be traditional businesses.

Ms Caldwell informed Members that the businesses were in different sectors including digital and creative. They were working with specialists who were helping businesses to work together to search out better contracts.

The family business network had opened up and a pilot scheme was being expanded. The network provided intermediaries to help with legal and tax issues as well as working within the family.

- *How far does the contact extend into the rural economy?*

Ms Caldwell explained that the Growth Hub covered the whole county so took in rural and urban businesses. A lot of rural businesses sell their goods in the city so the city depends on the rural businesses. However the hub was not working with agricultural businesses at present.

The Deputy Chief Executive stated that the work depended upon the number of employees within a business and the number in agriculture was low. However there was some potential to work with agricultural businesses in Carlisle.

- *The rural areas are important and help and support are needed in those areas.*

Ms Caldwell suggested that the issues could be considered as part of the Task and Finish Group. The Economic Development Officer added that the rural growth hubs would also play a part in supporting rural businesses. The Director of Economic Development advised that European funding was also available to rural businesses.

Ms Caldwell further advised that there was a strong demand for funding within the food sector and a number of small businesses were coming through. The Hub was working with small and medium food businesses and directing them to experts for support.

There was discussion about car parking charges and the potential impact on businesses within the City Centre.

- *It was important that the Council and businesses worked together.*

Ms Caldwell advised that the Chamber of Commerce appreciated the budgeting session held with businesses and it enhanced the understanding of business constraints.

- *Businesses are not confined to the Cumbria boundary. The recent independence debate suggested that Carlisle was an economic centre for Dumfries and Galloway. There was also the link with Northumberland.*

Mr Dodd advised that Professor Peck was doing a lot of work with the CRED. The City Business Group had been set up on the back of the Business Improvement District and did not include businesses in the rural area.

Ms Caldwell stated that there was business support available through the Chamber of Commerce to businesses in rural areas.

- *As the economy grows in Carlisle would the Enterprise Centre be included?*

The Economic Development Officer advised that there were limitations on what the Enterprise Centre could offer mainly due to the broadband provision. However there was ongoing interest in the Centre but there was no change in the conversion levels. Many people starting up new businesses are working from home and it is a big step to move into offices.

The Director of Economic Development suggested that following the meeting Members of the Task and Finish Group could visit the Chamber of Commerce and meet people who were in the process of setting up a small business. It would also be useful to pull together a data pack of facts and figures, and to include the Economic Development Officer in the project.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their input and hoped that the Task and Finish Group would be able to work with partners to help to expand and develop support in Carlisle.

RESOLVED: 1) That Report ED.43/14 – Business Support – Background Paper be noted.

2) that a Task and Finish Group be set up to look at business support in Carlisle.

The meeting was adjourned at 11.55 for lunch and reconvened at 1:00pm in the Flensburg Room of the Civic Centre, Carlisle.

EEOSP.70/14 OVERVIEW REPORT AND WORK PROGRAMME

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented report OS.23/14 which provided an overview of matters relating to the work of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel and included the latest version of the work programme and Key Decisions of the Executive which related to the Panel.

- The Overview and Scrutiny Officer reported that the Notice of Key Executive Decisions, published on 10 October 2014, included the following items which fell within the remit of this Panel.

KD.20/14 – Talkin Tarn Business Plan – the item was on the agenda for consideration later in the meeting.

KD.24/14 – North West Coast Connections Project – Route Corridor Consultation – a report was to be considered by the Executive on 10 November 2014 who would respond to the consultation.

KD.25/14 – Budget Process 2015/16 –the budget proposals will be considered by the Panel at their meeting on 27 November 2014. The Chief Accountant had arranged training for Members on the budget and the Overview and Scrutiny Officer suggested it would be useful for Members to attend to enable them to better understand the budget process.

- The minute excerpts from the meeting of the Executive on 13 October 2014 were circulated.
- Work Programme – The Overview and Scrutiny Officer presented the current work programme and advised Members that Councillor Dodd, due to work commitments, could no longer continue as lead member on the Litter Bin Review Task and Finish Group. Councillor Bloxham would take over as lead member. It was anticipated that an interim report would be presented to the next meeting of the Panel. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer would meet with the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Panel and the Director of Local Environment to discuss waste issues.

The Director of Local Environment stated that she had hoped to have the results of the public consultation back in time for the next meeting of the Panel. However responses had been slow and it had been agreed to keep the consultation open until the end of December. An analysis of the responses would be required before the results could be presented to Members. There would be an update on progress at the next meeting and the matter would come back to the Panel as a referral from the Executive early in the New Year.

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder was disappointed that the response to the consultation had been so poor as a number of staff had been involved. The survey had also been on the Council's website since the summer and only 400 responses had been received.

The Overview and Scrutiny Officer advised that an update report on purple sacks and bring sites would also be presented at the next meeting.

- Following the earlier discussions on business support a Task and Finish group would be set up. The Overview and Scrutiny Officer agreed to send an e-mail to all Members seeking volunteers for that Group.

RESOLVED – 1) That, subject to the issues raised above, the Overview Report incorporating the Work Programme and Notice of Executive Decisions items relevant to this Panel be noted.

2) that the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to e-mail all Members seeking volunteers for a Business Support Task and Finish Group

3) that an update report on waste issues including purple sacks and bring sites be submitted for the next meeting of the Panel.

EEOSP.71/14 TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The Strategic Property Manager presented report ED.41/14 – Tourist Information Centre – that provided Members with an update on Phase 2 of the Old Town Hall Scheme, Carlisle.

The Officer outlined the background to the scheme and reminded Members that the Phase 2 project followed on from the Phase 1 restoration and repair works completed in June 2013. In September 2013 the Council approved the release of capital funding to facilitate the appointment of a main contractor to complete recommended site works.

A two stage tender exercise was undertaken and the contract awarded on a 50:50 price/quality split. A recommendation for the award of contract will be made on completion of an appraisal exercise subject to the scheme being viable in terms of delivery within budget.

The Strategic Property Manager outlined the way in which the Project Steering Group would continue to monitor progress against the key activities.

In parallel with the appointment of the main contract Property Services were assisting the Tourist Information Centre Manager on the sourcing of temporary alternative accommodation for the six month period of site works between January and July 2015.

Post Phase 2 completion figures for visitor numbers and income were subject to an ongoing review by the Tourist Information Centre Manager. That information, together with feedback from the visitor survey and increased use of the Assembly Room would be reviewed to ensure that management and operational arrangements were put in place to build upon the high standards and good reviews of the Tourist Information Centre by developing its role as an information hub for Carlisle's historic, cultural and visitor assets.

Progression of the Phase 2 project would also ensure that the City Council supported private sector growth in the visitor economy by maximising the use of the Old Town Hall following completion of the Phase 1 repair and restoration works. That will be achieved by the targeted improvement in the quality of the offer and service standards which will help to increase visitor numbers, spend and overnight stays by increasing the attractiveness of Carlisle as a visitor destination.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Were the tenders from local companies?*

The Strategic Property Manager explained that at least one of the companies was local and confirmed that the tender would be awarded on a 50:50 quality/price basis.

- *Where would the Tourist Information Centre re-locate to to enable the required work to be undertaken?*

The Strategic Property Manager explained that there were several options available but it was likely that the Centre would stay within the pedestrian area of the City Centre or at the railway station. It would be difficult for a landlord to commit to a lease at this stage as it was only for six months. If there was nowhere available there could be space at the Civic Centre.

The Strategic Property Manager advised that the tenant of the property beneath the Tourist Information Centre had been served notice to vacate the premises. The owners had not been offered an alternative property but had known about the situation for the past year.

RESOLVED: 1. That report ED.41/14 – Tourist Information Centre – be noted.

EEOSP.72/14 PUBLIC REALM

The Strategic Property Manager presented a video to Members of the route from the railway station to the City Centre. The Strategic Property Manager reminded Members that the last update had been in November 2013 and it appeared that not a lot of progress had been made over the past year with regard to signage. A lot of work had been undertaken in the background and a pedestrian signage audit had been undertaken along with the development of a suite of signs that can be put in with different options for trails, different types of signage including the use of digital media, etc. The Strategic Property Manager was working with colleagues at the County Council, Virgin Trains and Tullie House. An app had been developed by Tullie House and was due to go live at the end of October/early November that linked to the historic quarter. A contractor had been appointed to manufacture the signage needed and they were currently developing a prototype to test the design and materials.

All of the public realm development focussed on signage and its implementation across the City. Officers had looked at the key gateways and how to navigate around the City. There were issues when arriving at Carlisle station such as no welcome sign, no guidance and no signage to direct visitors to the central parts of the City.

The Strategic Property Manager suggested that the railings around the now closed toilets could be removed. There was no information about the history of the Citadel. The intention was to direct visitors to the Tourist Information Centre with routes from there. There was a lot of work to be done including a lot of background work. A lot of work had been done with Virgin Trains who were also working on signage. The final decision depends upon the schemes put forward and funding. There were a number of projects at different stages and a report would be taken to the Executive about how best to move forward.

In considering the presentation Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *When will it be clearer what is happening with the fourteen projects?*

The Strategic Property Manager explained that a report would be presented to JMT in November with regard to the position in respect of signage, the appointment of a contractor and the Paddy's Market scheme.

The Strategic Property Manager confirmed that the County Council had undertaken a review of signage with a view to de-cluttering.

- *The County Council has a de-cluttering group but needs to work with partners to decide upon a design agreed by all parties. Once a design was agreed then the group could look at how the signage could be funded.*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder believed that there were too many signs and they lost their impact. The Highways and Transport Group had been advised that when work was undertaken any redundant signs would be removed. Officers in the City Council were looking for a local manufacturer to provide prices on the suite of signs commissioned. The Portfolio Holder believed there should be information signs to indicate the history of the relevant location.

The Strategic Property Manager advised that the intention was to have information signs as well as directional signs. There was a sign at the Citadel but it was hidden from view.

- *It was important that if there was agreement on principle and style an approach could be made when a partner was able to pay to enable the matter to progress. De-cluttering was expensive.*

The Strategic Property Manager stated that the projects developed by the City Council would allow the de-cluttering of other areas. The City Council were working with other partners including the County Council and regular meetings of the Public Realm group were held.

- *The historical interpretation of signage is important as well as directional signs from key points. With regard to the gateway to the City there was the opportunity to sell the City as visitors were entering as it was a major focal point.*

The Strategic Property Manager advised that Officers were trying to develop a unique brand for Carlisle. The Council had presented a suite of signs which were currently under discussion.

- *It would be useful to look at good practice elsewhere.*

Good practice elsewhere would be picked up. The Strategic Property Manager stated that the focus on an area changed over time and it would be useful to have a focal panel that could be changed and updated cheaply when necessary.

- *Because we live here we don't notice the issues about signage. It is an affront to visitors to be asked to pay for a map when digital information could be made available free of charge such as Q readers or maps.*

The Strategic Property Manager explained that he had been working with Virgin Trains on developing signage on trains or as soon as the visitor leaves the train. Virgin Trains were looking at a facility where information could be downloaded whilst travelling on the train. The Strategic Property Manager was also working with Virgin Trains with regard to improving information about the Carlisle offer in the station, visible to visitors to Carlisle but also to those passing through. One of the options would be to highlight Carlisle's success stories, such as McVities, Pirelli, etc. Historically Carlisle had been poor at selling itself.

RESOLVED: that an update report be submitted to the Panel in April 2015 on the Public Realm and the Tourist Information Centre.

EEOSP.73/14 TALKIN TARN COUNTRY PARK

The Director of Local Environment submitted report LE.22/14A – Talkin Tarn Country Park – which included the Business Plan that aimed to increase the revenue generated at Talkin Tarn by exploring the opportunities for new activities by improving the presentation of the catering offer at the Tarn. New and improved facilities would attract new visitors and encourage them to stay longer. At the same time the natural beauty and wildlife value of Talkin Tarn would be protected.

The Report included Report LE.19/14A which had been considered by the Executive at their meeting on 13 October 2014 when it was resolved:

That the Executive referred the draft Talkin Tarn Business Plan to the next meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration and comment to allow the report and associated Business Plan to move forward for wider consultation.

By way of background, it was explained that Talkin Tarn Country Park was acquired by Carlisle City Council in 2006 after being declared 'surplus to requirements' by Cumbria County Council. Since the transfer the City Council had invested in excess of £1m in the park, replacing dilapidated buildings and infrastructure. The new toilet block, education cabin and workshop/office buildings all incorporated a number of energy-saving technologies, including an air-source heat exchanger, photo-voltaic solar panels, rainwater recycling and sun-tubes to provide natural light.

For the first 5 years following the transfer the County Council provided a 'dowry' of £40,000 per annum, which helped to offset annual revenue costs. With the period of funding having expired, the Tarn was now in the position of needing to generate sufficient annual income to cover the operating costs.

Although visitor numbers had not been directly counted, previous traffic counts and current sales of car-parking tickets indicated around 120,000 – 150,000 per annum arriving by car, with an unknown number arriving by alternative means including on foot and by bicycle. Whilst the majority of visitors originated from the Carlisle post-code area, there was a tradition of day-visitors coming from the Tyne Valley which trend seemed to be continuing.

Looking ahead, it would be increasingly important to explore all opportunities for generating income at Talkin Tarn in ways that were appropriate to its landscape setting and wildlife resources. The Tarn was a cherished local beauty spot and, as such, needed to be treated with necessary respect. The draft Business Plan appended to the report set out some options for ways in which that balanced approach could be achieved and suggestions for generating additional income which fell within the following categories:

- Attracting new visitors
- Encouraging repeat visits
- New income streams
- Improving the visitor / spend ratio.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Manager had looked at comments on Trip Advisor which had been positive. The only negative comments had been in respect of dog fouling which was a major issue in all open spaces. If information was provided enforcement officers could target those areas. Enforcement teams had been doing more to remind people about dog waste and directing them to dog waste bins. They were now working on raising awareness of how dog fouling spoils the enjoyment for other users.

It was intended that the suggestions would allow the improvement and development of the Tarn so that it was no longer dependent upon Council budget for funding. The Green Spaces and Bereavement Manager reminded Members that Talkin Tarn contributed to the Central re-charges to a significant degree.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *This was a sound report that built upon the work of the Task and Finish Group making the Tarn a viable place to go.*
- *Joggers who are in the area early in the morning take their dogs and do not pick up the dog mess. Enforcement Officers should target those times.*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder stated that such information was needed and that the information would be taken up and acted upon.

- *With regard to dog fouling a stencil could be painted on to the paths advising people about dog waste bins.*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder stated that such signage would have to be in keeping with the area.

- *It had also been suggested that there was a lack of litter bins particularly in the car parking area.*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder reminded Members that bins needed emptying and that it may be possible to use the Big Belly Bins that had recently been trialled by the Council. The Green Spaces and Bereavement Manager advised that the Big Belly Bins had a large capacity and compactor and that Officers were evaluating their use at Talkin Tarn and Bitts Park.

- *When it is stated that losses are turning into profit it proves the value of scrutiny. Nothing had been said about using car parking tickets to provide a discount at the coffee shop/kiosk or similar to encourage people to return to the Tarn or stay longer.*

The Director of Local Environment explained that the Tarn was not making a net profit as yet as there was still a contribution of £54,000 from the City Council into the Talkin Tarn budget. Last year however, income targets had been exceeded by £4,000 so the net contribution from the City Council was reduced to £50,000 last year.

- *The catchment area for Talkin Tarn was substantial. How were Officers developing a marketing strategy?*

Any marketing strategy would have to be targeted carefully and would depend upon the information from the survey. Officers were looking at ways of marketing without spending any funds including tickets, discount schemes and/or loyalty cards and press releases. Information was also included regularly in the Focus magazine.

RESOLVED: 1. That Members of the Panel supported the Business Plan as set out in report LE.22/14B – Talkin Tarn Country Park.

PUBLIC AND PRESS

RESOLVED – That in accordance with Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the Public and Press were excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following item of business on the grounds that it involved the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in the paragraph number (as indicated in brackets against the minute) of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the 1972 Local Government Act.

EEOSP.74/14 TALKIN TARN COUNTRY PARK

(Public and Press excluded by virtue of Paragraph 3)

The Director of Local Environment presented report LE.22/14B that included the draft Business Plan for Talkin Tarn Country Park which aimed to make the site cost neutral in the Council's budget.

Report included Report LE.19/14B which had been considered by the Executive at their meeting on 13 October 2014 when it was resolved:

That the Executive referred the draft Talkin Tarn Business Plan to the next meeting of the Environment and Economy Overview and Scrutiny Panel for consideration and comment to allow the report and associated Business Plan to move forward for wider consultation.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Manager advised of a number of suggestions to potentially increase income at the Tarn. Those suggestions would need to be worked up into a more detailed Business Plan.

In considering the report Members raised the following comments and questions:

- *Local schools regularly go on trips but do not consider Talkin Tarn? Better marketing could pay dividends in the longer term.*
- *Signage from Brampton station could be improved as well as the path from the station to the Tarn.*

The Environment and Transport Portfolio Holder believed that whatever new ventures were undertaken they must be in balance with the area.

The Green Spaces and Bereavement Manager explained that a survey had been undertaken but there had not yet been sufficient numbers to provide a representative sample.

RESOLVED: 1. That Members of the Panel supported the Business Plan as set out in report LE.22/14B – Talkin Tarn Country Park.

(The meeting ended at 2.45pm)